

Part II: the Fight-back

Chapter 7: The Canadian Grand Prix

Ayrton Senna had now won two Grands Prix to Michael Schumacher's three. The Brazilian had thus reduced the gap to the Championship leader from 30 points after the fateful San Marino Grand Prix, but only to 22 points, since Schumacher had come second to Senna in both previous races. The winners' tables did prove, though, that the performance of both drivers and cars was not too dissimilar.

With the skyline of the Quebecois capital Montréal as backdrop, the Formula One circus moved across the Atlantic Ocean to the Île Notre-Dame for the Canadian Grand Prix. Along with the nearby Île Sainte-Hélène, this man-made island — for which rocks excavated for the construction of the Montréal metro were used — in the Saint Lawrence River, just east of the city centre, had hosted the 1967 World's Fair, Expo 67. Sadly, most of the pavilions for the World Fair were demolished when Montréal prepared to host the 1976 Summer Olympics. After the Games, the roads on the Île Notre-Dame were first used for the Canadian Grand Prix in 1978. Prior to the 1994 race, Damon Hill said: "Everyone enjoys going to Canada, there is a very friendly feel to the place and the crowd is enthusiastic and not at all partisan. The circuit is rather plain and not much of a challenge, but it is still technically quite difficult and very hard on brakes."

At Sauber, Italian Andrea De Cesaris replaced the still-injured Karl Wendlinger. The Austrian had suffered a massive crash at the Monaco Grand Prix, after which he had been in an induced coma for several weeks. Although he was now making a rapid recovery, it would still be some time until, if at all, he would return at the wheel of a Formula One car. De Cesaris was a veteran of over thirteen seasons — he would in fact drive his 200th Grand Prix in Canada — and had already driven two races for Jordan, in 1994, replacing Eddie Irvine, scoring two points.

Simtek decided to run a single car due to Andrea Montermini suffering from injuries sustained in a crash at the Spanish Grand Prix.

There were more rules changes, announced at the Monaco Grand Prix, put into effect in Canada. The most prominent of which was the obligatory use of pump fuel, and banning of special fuels formulated for Formula One. Also, a pit lane speed limit of 80 km/h was introduced. And lastly, a chicane was built at the fast right-left-right Esses, just after the hairpin at the back of the circuit, to reduce speed on the straight that followed. The exit of the chicane used part of the old pit lane exit.

History

The first Canadian Grand Prix had been held in 1961 as a sportscar race, which was often dominated by Formula One regulars, like American Masten Gregory, winner in '62, and Mexican Pedro Rodríguez, who took the race twice for Ferrari. The Canadian GP first appeared on the Formula One World Championship in '67, alternating between Mosport Park in Bowmanville, in the Ontario province, and Circuit Mont-Tremblant, in Quebec. After 1971 the race permanently moved to Mosport, only to relocate to its current home on the Île Notre-Dame in Montréal in 1978.

At that first occasion, Gilles Villeneuve, a Quebec native born in nearby Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, took the chequered flag, the only time a Canadian won his home Grand Prix to date. Villeneuve later went on to win the 1982 World Championship for Ferrari, after which the Montreal circuit was named after him. Interestingly, a local team had also won the Canadian GP, albeit once, in 1977, with South African Jody Scheckter.

During the 1982 event, tragedy occurred when Villeneuve's team mate Didier Pironi stalled on the grid. Young Italian driver Riccardo Paletti crashed into the rear of the standing Ferrari, and, after having been extracted from his Osella-Ford and flown to nearby Royal Victoria Hospital, succumbed to his injuries.

The Canadian Grand Prix was not held in 1987 due to a dispute between two local sponsors, breweries Labatt and Molson. During the year off, the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve was modified, and the pit lane and complex, and the start line moved to its current location.

No less than eight drivers had won the previous ten issues of the Canadian Grand Prix. Only five drivers had taken victory more than once, since 1967, of which Nelson Piquet was the most successful with three wins, in 1982, '84 and '91. Jacky Ickx, Jackie Stewart, Alan Jones and Ayrton Senna had all won the Canadian GP twice. McLaren was the most successful constructor in the Canadian race, with seven wins, two more than Williams. Brabham and Ferrari both had four wins to their name, and Tyrrell two.

Friday practice and qualifying

On Friday, it appeared that the team that had profited most from the switch to regular pump fuel, was Ferrari. Jean Alesi had posted the fastest lap time, with team mate Gerhard Berger only 48 thousandths adrift, and Ayrton Senna in third place, almost four tenths off the pace for Williams-Renault. Benetton's Michael Schumacher was fourth, and Damon Hill fifth.

During that afternoon's qualifying, it was again Alesi on top of the time sheets, but now Senna, Schumacher and McLaren's Mika Häkkinen had leapt past Berger. Ukyo Katayama was a surprising sixth for Tyrrell-Yamaha, beating Hill and Heinz-Harald Frentzen's Sauber. Martin Brundle drove his McLaren-Peugeot to ninth, going round the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve over two seconds slower than Alesi, but just ahead of Rubens Barrichello, in the Jordan.

"Except for Jean Alesi, everything seems normal today", stated Senna after the first qualifying session for the Canadian Grand Prix. "Everything else on the grid so far is what we expected, particularly when you look at our times when compared to Schumacher. The only name out of place is Alesi and it will be interesting to see what he does tomorrow." Schumacher added: "I am quite happy with what we have done; there are some small problems with the car, nothing serious, and there is not much grip but that is usual for this circuit."

Häkkinen admitted to being "pleased with this fourth place. Of course I would have liked to have done better, but this circuit does favour the very powerful engines. I am sure we will improve tomorrow: the car is very well balanced and it was very good to

drive.” Hill was disappointed, though: “I thought we were on target this morning, but we have slipped, so will have to do some more thinking and stay optimistic for tomorrow.”

Saturday practice and qualifying

The next morning, Alesi again went quickest, but Schumacher had kept the gap to the Ferrari driver to a mere 0.169 seconds. Senna was third, with team mate Hill right behind him, while Arrows’ Gianni Morbidelli was an amazing fifth.

For the second and last qualifying session, all eyes were thus on Alesi and Ferrari: could the Italian giants score their first pole position since Nigel Mansell’s at the 1990 Portuguese Grand Prix, almost four years ago? Sadly, that dream scenario would have wait a bit more, with Michael Schumacher pipping Alesi to pole with less than a tenth of a second to spare. Senna split the Ferrari drivers, relegating Berger to fourth, while Hill was fifth, and Barrichello sixth. Seventh place went to Häkkinen, eighth to Jordan’s Eddie Irvine, and Katayama and Frentzen completed the top ten on the grid for the race.

“It’s fantastic to finally take pole position, we really had to fight for it”, said Schumacher of the first pole of his career. “I honestly didn’t expect such a big improvement. The car performed very well this afternoon thanks to major changes, which helped a great deal.” “I’m a bit sad for Alesi, who has been very quick all weekend”, admitted Senna, “But I congratulate Michael with his pole position. I am quite pleased with my own position, in third, and expect to be able to move further to the front during the race, tomorrow.”

J.J. Lehto could only manage 20th place in qualifying for Benetton, and showed his frustration afterwards: “Obviously, I’m really disappointed. We continued to have the same problems as yesterday and, no matter what we tried, it made very little difference. We improved the car a little, but nowhere near enough to get me where I need to be on the grid.”

The starting order for the race:

| | | |
|-----|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Michael Schumacher | Benetton-Ford |
| 2. | Jean Alesi | Ferrari |
| 3. | Ayrton Senna | Williams-Renault |
| 4. | Gerhard Berger | Ferrari |
| 5. | Damon Hill | Williams-Renault |
| 6. | Rubens Barrichello | Jordan-Hart |
| 7. | Mika Häkkinen | McLaren-Peugeot |
| 8. | Eddie Irvine | Jordan-Hart |
| 9. | Ukyo Katayama | Tyrrell-Yamaha |
| 10. | Heinz-Harald Frentzen | Sauber-Mercedes |
| 11. | Gianni Morbidelli | Footwork-Ford |
| 12. | Martin Brundle | McLaren-Peugeot |
| 13. | Mark Blundell | Tyrrell-Yamaha |
| 14. | Andrea De Cesaris | Sauber-Mercedes |
| 15. | Pierluigi Martini | Minardi-Ford |
| 16. | Christian Fittipaldi | Footwork-Ford |
| 17. | Johnny Herbert | Lotus-Mugen-Honda |
| 18. | Michele Alboreto | Minardi-Ford |
| 19. | Olivier Panis | Ligier-Renault |
| 20. | J.J. Lehto | Benetton-Ford |
| 21. | Érik Comas | Larrousse-Ford |
| 22. | Olivier Beretta | Larrousse-Ford |
| 23. | Alessandro Zanardi | Lotus-Mugen-Honda |
| 24. | Éric Bernard | Ligier-Renault |
| 25. | David Brabham | Simtek-Ford |
| 26. | Bertrand Gachot | Pacific-Ilmor |

Because Simtek ran a single car, Paul Belmondo was the sole driver not qualifying for the Canadian Grand Prix, falling a mere 0.168 seconds behind Pacific team mate Bertrand Gachot.

Race day

To the surprise of everyone in the Montréal pits, Martin Brundle was quickest on Sunday morning, with all cars running in race trim. The McLaren driver was some half a second faster than second-placed Ayrton Senna, while Gerhard Berger and Jean Alesi were seven and eight tenths of a second behind, taking for Ferrari, with Jordan's Rubens Barrichello in fifth. Michael Schumacher was a massive 1.5 seconds adrift in tenth place.

However, come two o'clock that afternoon, Schumacher would have a mighty getaway at the start of the Grand Prix. Senna eclipsed Alesi at the first corner to move into second, with the Frenchman being followed by team mate Berger in fourth. In the midfield, Gianni Morbidelli, who had started eleventh, overtook both Ukyo Katayama and Heinz-Harald Frentzen to take ninth, with Eddie Irvine's eight place up for grabs.

In front, Schumacher opened a gap to Senna at a rate of about half a second per lap. At lap 10, the Brazilian was already some five seconds behind the leading Benetton. Another ten laps later, the gap had increased to almost ten seconds, with the German starting to control the race. Behind Senna, Alesi followed only a couple of seconds adrift, but Hill was on a charge, having taken Berger for fourth.

Approaching half distance of the Canadian Grand Prix, Ferrari's Alesi pitted from third place on lap 31, leaving his position to Hill. The Briton stopped for fuel and fresh tyres two laps later, but stayed ahead of the Frenchman when returning to the track. On lap 34 Senna also stopped, handing Schumacher a massive lead of almost 40 seconds. His team's strategy put the German spot on for victory: his one and only pit stop coming in lap 40 of 69. And although Senna and Hill had cut Schumacher's lead to 28 seconds, that gave the Benetton driver more than enough to top up his car and put on new tyres, and still stay in the lead, with time to spare. On that same lap, a bit of rain fell on the Montréal circuit, surprising Jordan's Irvine, who spun at the final corner, having already dropped behind earlier on.

When all protagonists had done their pit stops — of the front-runners, Berger and Morbidelli had opted for a two-stop race — the order was Schumacher, followed by Senna and Hill, at over almost 30 seconds, Alesi and Berger in 4th and 5th respectively, with McLaren's Mika Häkkinen close behind. He and Berger had a short battle for 5th

place, but this came to an early end when Häkkinen's Peugeot engine failed on lap 62. This gave Christian Fittipaldi 6th place for Arrows. That order didn't change anymore, handing Schumacher his fourth Grand Prix victory of the season, taking another ten points for the Championship. After the race, though, Fittipaldi was disqualified for having raced 2.5 kg underweight, costing his team a valuable point. This went to J.J. Lehto and Benetton.

"This win was not as straight-forward as it might have looked", said Schumacher after the race. "Although no-one actually got really close to me, there were a number of fights as I maintained the gap to the car behind me." Senna added: "I had a good start, taking Alesi, but had a tough race after that. We were not in a position to challenge Michael for the lead, but I am happy for the team, since Damon was also on the podium".

Hill said of his second podium finish of the season: "I lost a little bit at the start as I didn't make a good one. I tried not to get wheelspin and just stayed on the line too long. I enjoyed the race, having overtaken both Ferrari's to wind up on the podium. The car was better than Barcelona and I think we have made improvements, but we still haven't hit upon that thing that is going to put us ahead of Michael." Lastly, late non-finisher Häkkinen added: "I had a positive start, but then I got caught in traffic. After that I was having a good race, managing to overtake many cars by late braking them. Then a misfire developed when I was pushing on Berger. One lap later the engine failed."

The complete finishing order:

| | | | |
|----|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1. | Michael Schumacher | Benetton-Ford | 1:44'31.887 |
| 2. | Ayrton Senna | Williams-Renault | +27.835 |
| 3. | Damon Hill | Williams-Renault | +39.660 |
| 4. | Jean Alesi | Ferrari | +1'13.388 |
| 5. | Gerhard Berger | Ferrari | +1'15.609 |
| 6. | J.J. Lehto | Benetton-Ford | -1 lap |
| 7. | Rubens Barrichello | Jordan-Hart | -1 lap |
| 8. | Johnny Herbert | Lotus-Mugen-Honda | -1 lap |
| 9. | Pierluigi Martini | Minardi-Ford | -1 lap |

| | | | |
|-----|------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 10. | Mark Blundell | Tyrrell-Yamaha | -2 laps (Spun off) |
| 11. | Michele Alboreto | Minardi-Ford | -2 laps |
| 12. | Olivier Panis | Ligier-Renault | -2 laps |
| 13. | Éric Bernard | Ligier-Renault | -3 laps |
| 14. | David Brabham | Simtek-Ford | -4 laps |

Did not finish

| | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 15. | Alessandro Zanardi | Lotus-Mugen-Honda | Engine (lap 62) |
| 16. | Mika Häkkinen | McLaren-Peugeot | Engine (61) |
| 17. | Olivier Beretta | Larrousse-Ford | Engine (57) |
| 18. | Gianni Morbidelli | Footwork-Ford | Transmission (50) |
| 19. | Bertrand Gachot | Pacific-Ilmor | Oil pressure (47) |
| 20. | Érik Comas | Larrousse-Ford | Clutch (45) |
| 21. | Ukyo Katayama | Tyrrell-Yamaha | Collision (44) |
| 22. | Eddie Irvine | Jordan-Hart | Spun off (40) |
| 23. | Andrea De Cesaris | Sauber-Mercedes | Oil pressure (24) |
| 24. | Heinz-Harald Frentzen | Sauber-Mercedes | Spun off (5) |
| 25. | Martin Brundle | McLaren-Peugeot | Electrical (3) |

Finished, but disqualified

| | | | |
|-----|----------------------|---------------|--------|
| 26. | Christian Fittipaldi | Footwork-Ford | -1 lap |
|-----|----------------------|---------------|--------|

Schumacher had not only taken pole and victory, but also posted the fastest lap of the race, completing a Grand Chelem.

The Championship

With Schumacher's fourth win from seven GPs, he now had double the amount of points of Senna.

| | | |
|----|--------------------|-----------|
| 1. | Michael Schumacher | 52 points |
| 2. | Ayrton Senna | 26 |

| | | |
|-----|-----------------------|----|
| 3. | Damon Hill | 11 |
| 4. | Jean Alesi | 11 |
| 5. | Gerhard Berger | 11 |
| 6. | Rubens Barrichello | 7 |
| 7. | Nicola Larini | 6 |
| 8. | Mika Häkkinen | 4 |
| 9. | Martin Brundle | 4 |
| 10. | Karl Wendlinger | 4 |
| 11. | Ukyo Katayama | 4 |
| 12. | Mark Blundell | 4 |
| 13. | Christian Fittipaldi | 3 |
| 14. | Heinz-Harald Frentzen | 2 |
| 15. | Andrea De Cesaris | 2 |
| 16. | Pierluigi Martini | 2 |
| 17. | Érik Comas | 1 |
| 18. | Eddie Irvine | 1 |
| 19. | J.J. Lehto | 1 |

All but a single point for the Benetton team came from Schumacher's performance, earning them a respectable lead of 15 points over rivals Williams.

| | | |
|-----|------------------|-----------|
| 1. | Benetton-Ford | 53 points |
| 2. | Williams-Renault | 37 |
| 3. | Ferrari | 28 |
| 4. | Jordan-Hart | 10 |
| 5. | McLaren-Peugeot | 8 |
| 6. | Tyrrell-Yamaha | 8 |
| 7. | Sauber-Mercedes | 7 |
| 8. | Footwork-Ford | 3 |
| 9. | Minardi-Ford | 2 |
| 10. | Larrousse-Ford | 1 |

Aftermath